

## Sermon for 12th January 2025 Baptism of our Lord

Text- Luke 3:<sup>21</sup> *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened* <sup>22</sup> *and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

How often do you say to your children, I love you, I'm proud of you? Did you, or do you hear those words spoken to you by your father?

As I reflect on myself as a father, I know I could have said these words a lot more often. I love you, I'm proud of you. I am pleased with you.

Maybe you have said those words to your children or had them said by your parents after a great achievement. At a graduation or doing well at a sports day.

So, what is the great achievement Jesus doing that his heavenly father is so pleased with him? We are told that people are coming to John the Baptist to be baptised and Jesus is baptised along with everyone else. Then as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Why would it please his heavenly father for his Son to be baptised? Isn't he the one born without sin? Why would Jesus need to be baptised by John, if the baptism John was doing is for the repentance of sins?

Jesus' baptism pleases his heavenly father because it fulfils God's plan to save you and me, and all who hear the word of God and keep it from our sins. As Jesus is baptised in the river Jordan, he takes on himself the sins of the world and begins his earthly mission of revealing God's kingdom to the world, that ends with his suffering and death on the cross.

But what did John the Baptist mean when he said, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

What does it mean, baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire?

In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them".

Isaiah seems to allude to baptism. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

What is this fire that does not burn or consume. We know that Moses was drawn to a burning bush as the fire did not consume the bush. God then spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

Yet in Luke 3:9, Luke warns the people, produce fruit in keeping with repentance, for the axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

When Luke says, he will baptise the Holy Spirit and with fire, he follows with, His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

So, what is Jesus consuming and destroying in baptism, while at the same time, purifying and refining and anointing with the Holy Spirit?

When we consider what Luther says baptism gives, which is forgiveness of sins and freedom from death and the devil, then what Jesus is consuming and destroying in baptism is sin, death and the devil. Therefore, baptism joins us to Jesus and his judgment over good and evil. The image John gives us of Jesus judging over good and evil on a threshing floor, where the good wheat is gathered, and the useless chaff is blown aside by the wind to be burned with unquenchable fire.

Which means Jesus has come to gather into the kingdom of God that which is good and what is evil will be destroyed. So, how will Jesus judge you and me? Will you be welcomed and gathered in God's kingdom? To be gathered into his kingdom, sin must be destroyed. Death must be destroyed. The power of the devil must be destroyed.

Through his baptism, Jesus shows he is ready and willing to be about his father's business of destroying sin, death and the devil. Jesus has come to fulfill God's word to his people through the prophet Isaiah, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

It's a reminder of God rescuing Moses and his people from slavery through the parted waters of the Red Sea. At the river Jordan, the same river the Israelites crossed from the wilderness into the promised land, Jesus was baptised and the Spirit descended on him. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are freed from the power of sin, death and the power of the devil, because they are consumed and destroyed through baptism. Baptism purifies and refines us into the new reborn people God makes us.

God says to you, I have redeemed you, I have summoned you by name, you are mine. I sent my Son to take your sin. Judgement is mine, repent and believe in me. God's love, God's mercy and grace says, Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, I formed and made.'

God has made a way for us to be gathered into his family. That is through baptism. A baptism of water and the Spirit. A baptism of Spirit and fire. A baptism that daily purifies and refines as we confess our sins to God daily and seek forgiveness.

Luther as part of his morning prayer prayed, I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You.

His evening prayer included, I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night.

For Luther, that's what living the baptised life is. Daily being purified and refined as a child of God through sin being destroyed. It pleased God through his beloved son, to take on your sins and set you free from them. Through Jesus, God says to you, you are my beloved, with you I am well pleased.

Therefore, you can pray as Luther also prayed in his evening prayer, for into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen